

# Guide to the Food Stamp Program

This Information is available in alternate formats. Phone (800) 842-1508 or TDD/TTY (800) 842-4524.

## What are Food Stamps?

The Food Stamp program helps people buy food. The Federal government created the program to help people with low incomes eat well to stay healthy.

If you are eligible, we put your Food Stamp benefits in an electronic bank account. We will give you a plastic Electronic Benefits Transfer "EBT" card to use to buy food at stores that take Food Stamps. You can use your EBT card at most grocery stores.

## **You may be able to get Food Stamps within seven days if:**

- Your household's total income is less than \$150 per month and your household's assets are less than \$100 (assets include cash on hand and money you have in the bank),
- Your rent and utilities are more than your monthly income before deductions, or
- You are a migrant seasonal farm worker **and** your household's cash and money in the bank is less than \$100.

If these situations don't apply, you may receive Food Stamps within 30 days of the date we receive your application.

## Are you eligible?

Your eligibility for Food Stamps and the amount of your Food Stamp benefit depends on:

- how many people you live with, which we call your household;
- how much income your household has each month (see income table below);
- what assets your household has;
- and how much your household has to pay each month for things like rent or mortgage, utilities, child care, and child support.

We also consider medical expenses if anyone in your household is at least 60 years old or disabled.

## How can I tell if I would qualify?

Assets, such as savings accounts, must be less than \$2000, or \$3000 if a person 60 or older or a person with a disability is in your household.

We do not count one motor vehicle per household if the equity value is less than \$9500.

Income Table	
Number of People in Household	GROSS Monthly Income Is Less Than
1 Member	\$1,037
2 Members	\$1,390
3 Members	\$1,744
4 Members	\$2,097
5 Members	\$2,450
6 Members	\$2,803
7 Members	\$3,156

You can see if you might be eligible for Food Stamps by completing the eligibility pre-screener on the internet at [www.foodstampsct.org](http://www.foodstampsct.org).

## How do I get Food Stamps?

### **1. Get an application.**

You can get an application at your local Department of Social Services (DSS) office, call to have one mailed to you, or get one through the Internet at [www.dss.state.ct.us](http://www.dss.state.ct.us).

### **2. Fill out the whole application.**

The more information you give us now, the faster we can find out if you are eligible and how much Food Stamps you should get.

You can:

- fill it out yourself
- have someone help you.
- have your DSS worker help you.

### **3. Mail or bring the application to the DSS office nearest you.**

- drop it off in person,
- mail it or
- fax it

(Call Infoline at 211 to find the address and phone number of the DSS office nearest you.)

### **4. Have an interview.**

We will assign an eligibility worker to help you. This worker will tell you the date and time to come in for the interview. We usually have the interview at the local DSS office.

**If you cannot go to the DSS office**, call them and ask them to do the interview by phone. Make sure you give them a phone number where they can reach you **or** you can authorize someone you trust to go to the interview for you.

## What does the application ask for?

The application asks questions about:

- You and the people who live with you (your household)
- Your household's income from working or from other sources, such as Social Security
- Your household's assets such as savings and checking accounts, cars, etc.
- Your household's expenses for rent/mortgage, utilities, child support, child care, and medical expenses.

## What do I need to bring to my interview?

Please bring all of these items to your interview:

- ✓ Proof of identity (driver's license, etc.);
- ✓ Social Security Numbers for everyone in your household;
- ✓ Proof of earnings for anyone in your household who works (pay stubs for the past 4 weeks);
- ✓ Income tax return if you are self-employed;
- ✓ Proof of all other income (such as child support paid directly to you);
- ✓ Proof of shelter costs (rent receipt, mortgage coupon, utility bill, lease, etc.);
- ✓ Current bank statements for checking accounts, savings accounts, certificates of deposit, credit union accounts, retirement accounts, stocks, bonds, dividends, etc.;
- ✓ Proof of dependent care costs (cancelled checks, statement from provider, receipts, etc.);
- ✓ If anyone is 60 or older or is disabled, proof of medical expenses you pay out of your own pocket;
- ✓ Proof of child support payments and obligation; and
- ✓ Proof of your immigration status if you are not a U.S. citizen.
- ✓ Medicare Discount Card and any related information from Medicare.

## **What are my responsibilities?**

- You must tell the truth about your identity and where you live. If you are not truthful, you will not be able to get Food Stamps for up to 10 years.
- There are rules about when you must report changes in your household circumstances. These rules are different for each program. We will send you a notice with the rules for the programs you receive assistance from when your case is granted. No matter what programs you are on, it is very important to tell us when you move. If you don't tell us, we will not be able to send you your appointment notice for your redetermination of eligibility and we will close your case. Then you will have to apply all over again.
- You must cooperate with state and Federal workers in a Quality Control review, if your case is chosen for review. We do Quality Control reviews to make sure we processed your application correctly.
- You must follow all other Food Stamp Program rules to keep getting Food Stamps.

## **How long can I get Food Stamps?**

If you are an able-bodied adult and you do not live with any children under age 18, Federal law limits the amount of time you can get Food Stamps if you are not working. If you do not work, or are not in an approved work program, you can only get Food Stamps for three months in a three-year period. This law does not apply to you if any of the following statements are true:

- You are age 17 or younger,
- You are age 51 or older,
- You have a medical reason that keeps you from being able to work,
- You live with a child who is age 17 or younger,
- You are pregnant.
- You are excused from registering for the Food Stamp Employment & Training program. Your worker will tell you if you are excused.

## **How is my information verified?**

- We verify the identity and eligibility of all people in your Food Stamp household who are applying for Food Stamps by using their Social Security numbers. If someone lives with you but is not applying for Food Stamps, you do not have to give us their Social Security number. However, if you give us all the Social Security numbers, DSS may be able to process your application faster. We will do a computer match of the Social Security numbers against federal, state, and local government computer files.
- We may verify information about child support payments that are paid to the State on behalf of your child with the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement.
- We will request any information available about you and your household from the Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS). We will use the information we receive to process your application. We will get this information from the Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service. We may also get information from other agencies when allowed by law and from IEVS by contacting other sources like banks and employers ourselves. The results may affect your household's eligibility for Food Stamps and the amount of Food Stamps your household gets.

## **What are the penalties for breaking Food Stamp rules?**

- If you break any of the rules listed below, the first time you won't get Food Stamps for three (3) months. If you break the same rule a second time, you won't get Food Stamps for six (6) months. If you break the same rule a third time, you will never be able to get Food Stamps in Connecticut again.
  - You must not quit your job or cut your hours without a good reason. Talk to your caseworker if you have questions about good reasons to quit your job or cut back your hours.
- If you are found guilty of buying illegal drugs with Food Stamps, you will not be able to get Food Stamps for two years.
- If you misuse your EBT card on purpose, you may no longer get Food Stamps. You may also be fined up to \$250,000, be sent to jail for up to 20 years, or both. Misuse of an EBT card means changing, selling, or trading the card, using someone else's card without permission, or exchanging benefits.
- If you are found guilty of selling your Food Stamps instead of using them to buy food, you will never be able to get Food Stamps again.

## **What are my rights?**

- If you disagree with an action taken on your case you may ask us for a Fair Hearing, either by writing or by calling 1-800-462-0134.
- We keep the information on your application form confidential. We will only use this information as needed to administer the Food Stamp program, with one exception. The exception is that we must give to law enforcement officers the address, Social Security number and photograph of anyone who gets Food Stamps who is a fleeing felon, or is violating parole or probation. We must also give this information to law enforcement officers about someone who may know something about a felony.

## **Do I have the right to make a complaint?**

Under Federal and state law you have the right to make a complaint if you think we have taken actions against you because of your race, color, religion, creed, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, criminal record, past or present mental disorder, mental retardation, sexual orientation, physical or learning disability, including denying your request for a reasonable accommodation because of your disability. You or someone representing you may write to or call one or more of these agencies to make a complaint:

### **ADA/Affirmative Action CHRO:**

For complaints about the Food Stamp Program, write or call one or more of the following agencies:

**Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, 21 Grand Street, Hartford, CT 06106**, or call 1-860-541-3400 (TDD: 1-860-541-3459)

**US Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Whitten Building, Room 326-W, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington D.C. 20250-9410**, or call 1-202-720-5964 (voice and TDD).